

Sunday August 11, 2024
First Lesson: 1 Peter 2:2-3
Gospel Lesson: John 6:35, 41-51
Sermon Series: Read the Story: Stay With It
Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel

Good morning Beloved Community.

- We are continuing a 12-week journey through the sermon series "**Read the Story,**" focusing on the profound lessons found in the first epistle of Peter, tying in new gospels lessons each week continuing with the Gospel of John.
- Last week we began to unpack the gospel of John from the emphasis of "Turn the Page."
- The overall theme was an invitation for the people of that day to go through a paradigm shift— to essentially turn the page **from searching for Christ** for their physical bread and needs and instead to seek Christ **out of a desire for spiritual truth.**
- This week we are continuing with the same chapter of John from the aspect of : **stay with it.**

- The “it” that we are being invited to stay with in our gospel this morning, is this same quest for spiritual truth that I mentioned from last week— that I am suggesting **may be an aspect of the bread of life** that is being named in our gospel.
- What does Jesus mean when he says **I am the bread of life?**
- When Jesus declares, **"I am the bread of life,"** Jesus in my mind is offering us a profound metaphor that speaks to the deepest needs of the human soul.
- Bread, in its simplicity, represents sustenance, nourishment, and the most basic of human needs.
- Yet, in this statement, Jesus invites us to explore the layers of spiritual nourishment **that go beyond physical hunger**, touching the very core of our existence.
- Now in saying this, I need to confess that on the basic human level, I can understand how someone could wrestle with this idea that **all you and I need to do** to be successful in life is to simply crave spirit truth or subscribe to Jesus being the “bread of life”— especially if our physical needs aren’t being met.

- For example, our personal mortgage is going up by \$600.00 a month beginning this month.
- When Stephen and I got this notice back in May or June I believe, our first thought was not to say to ourselves—“Welp— we are going to just nourish on some of this bread of life and all will be well!”
- For although spiritually, “the bread of life” can be understood as the source of spiritual sustenance that feeds our inner being; the more practical and immediate concern for Stephen and I in this real life example I just shared is, “How are we going to keep up with this astronomical increase in our mortgage?”
- Let’s face it, meeting the physical demands of paying bills and keeping shelter both individually and collectively as a Church community is always going to remain a concern for us all!
- For the **bread of life** being named in our text does not guarantee that a windfall is coming our way.
- **The bread of life** in our story is not promising you and I that we will not experience any financial, personal or collective hardships.

- This is a long way of my naming that Stephen and I are still **going to have to make room in our budget** to accommodate this \$600.00 a month increase that will be coming like clockwork **whether we like it or not; whether we can afford it or not!**
- So the key question that this concerned homeowner is bringing to our passage today— that hopefully resonates with some of you as well is **“How can we stay with it?”** —when we all have real life demands and responsibilities that requires physical resources that we may not even have!
- For when Jesus says **I am the bread of life**, this does not translate to the rent or mortgage being paid, groceries in our refrigerator being replenished or any other material item being manifested into existence.
- In a society where we are constantly searching for fulfillment in material things, accomplishments, or relationships, **the bread of life** in our passage calls us to a different kind of sustenance.
- **It invites us to feed on something more enduring and life-giving.**

- Taking a closer look at our gospel lesson this morning,
- Starting with John 6:35, Jesus declares, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."
- This statement is part of a broader discourse known as the Bread of Life Discourse, delivered in the synagogue at Capernaum.
- Understanding the historical and cultural context of this passage enhances its significance and the depth of Jesus' teaching.
- **The imagery of bread** in ancient Israel was deeply rooted in the everyday life of the people.
- Bread was a staple food, essential for survival, and it symbolized God's provision, especially in the context of the Exodus when God provided manna from heaven to sustain the Israelites in the wilderness (Exodus 16).
- Similarly, in the Gen Z culture primarily in the larger cities, I have noticed the term "bread" becoming a part of their everyday language —where the term "bread" is equivalent to money.

- There seems to be this huge emphasis in this generation in particular— **of whether or not a person has “bread” or not.**
- The relevancy of my mentioning this is to underscore this idea that having sustenance or lack thereof will probably always be a consideration for us all;
- However, why I am particularly drawn to these younger generations is because it is in their living witness that I can see how things come full circle with humanity.
- The economic concerns of Gen Z and younger generations reflect a growing awareness of the challenges and uncertainties that define the current and future landscape.
- Unlike previous generations, these young people are coming of age in a world marked by rapid technological advancements, environmental crises, and profound shifts in the global economy.
- Their concerns are not just about personal financial stability but also about the broader implications of economic systems and structures on their lives and the world they will inherit.

- So the fact that these younger generations are coming back to utilizing this term of **bread** in a similar fashion to how the Israelites understood bread is not only fascinating to me—it really underscores how prophetic Jesus really is in identifying Himself as the "bread of life."
- For starters, Gen Z teaches us that bread is always something that every generation will understand and connect with as being important for survival.
- Secondly, by Jesus aligning Himself with this divine provision of Bread, there is a promise in the term "**bread of life**" where Jesus not only promises to fulfill our basic nourishment but to also surpass it.
- For where the manna provided physical sustenance temporarily, Jesus offers spiritual sustenance that leads to eternal life in the here, the now and the forevermore.
- Jesus, as the bread of life, is the spiritual food that satisfies the hunger for love, peace, and wholeness that we all carry within us.
- **This nourishment is not a one-time meal but an ongoing sustenance.**

- Just as we eat daily to keep our bodies healthy, we are called to daily partake in the bread of life—to seek Jesus in our thoughts, actions, and interactions.
- This might look like taking time for prayer and meditation, reflecting on Jesus teachings, or finding moments of stillness in the chaos of our lives to reconnect with our spiritual center—all which in doing so can help us to come back to our life situation and approach whatever lies ahead with a new perspective—with a new level of resilience.
- For it is in my life experience that **this is what occurs** when we come together in the name of love;
- **This is what occurs** when the people of God comes together in our prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness—in the name of Jesus.
- We grow, we reset, we forgive, we press forward!
- You see Church family we get to witness what happens to a community **when they lose sight of the bread** we are called to remain focused on... the Jews response to Jesus proclaiming to be the “bread of life” can be found in verses 41-42 of our story today—it says they

complained...they murmured...in other words, they were not moved by Jesus declaration at all.

- It is my observation that when faith communities lose sight of the "bread of life," they risk becoming spiritually malnourished, losing the essence of what it means to be a vibrant and life-giving body of Christ.
- One of the first signs of this drift is the shift from spiritual to superficial priorities.
- **When the bread of life** is no longer at the center, church activities may become more focused on maintaining traditions, programs, or institutional survival rather than fostering deep spiritual growth.
- Worship services might become more about routine and less about encountering the living Christ.
- Committees and meetings might prioritize budgets and buildings over discipleship and service.
- In such an environment, the church risks becoming more of a social club than a community of faith, where the true nourishment of the soul is neglected.
- As the focus shifts, the sense of connection within the community can also begin to weaken.

- **This is because again the bread of life** is not just about individual sustenance; it is also about the shared experience of God's grace and love that unites believers.
- When this central source of unity is lost, divisions and conflicts can arise more easily.
- Without the common foundation of Christ's presence and teachings, disagreements over secondary issues can become more pronounced, leading to fragmentation within the community.
- And we see this fragmentation in this community arise in our gospel when the people began to bicker among themselves in Vs- 42..saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?"
- In other words, not only has this community lost sight of Jesus, they lost sight of who and whose they were in the name of Jesus.
- And I would be remiss if I did not boldly proclaim to all of us today in light of this riveting conversation **that I don't want us to be this community...**

- In fact the fact that we just reached a historic status as proclaimed by the US Congress— dare I say **we are not this community...**
- For this community in our gospel today **they lost sight** of their vision,
- **This community in this story they lost sight** of their purpose,
- **This community like many communities..they lost sight** of their mission—and Jesus response to their rebuttal and dare I say dismissal of him being the “bread of life,” can be found in verse 43 as I paraphrase...**stop your complaining,**
- **Stop your bickering, stop your worrying—** and come on back to the bedrock of the foundation in which I built this community upon—
- Take and Eat this bread that was broken for you and for me and be reminded that no matter what your life struggle is—this is the living bread that will always be what truly sustains us all.

- In our journey of faith, we will often encounter moments that challenge our understanding and trust in God's provision.
- Just as the crowd struggled with Jesus' claim, we might find ourselves wrestling with doubts, particularly when our circumstances seem to contradict the promises of God.
- However, through it all, the invitation for us all is to **"stay with it!"**
- **Stay with our prayers** because God is still listening.
- **Stay with our presence** because it takes you and I being here to be able to take notice of the provisions that are already being made in spite of our struggles.
- **Stay with our gifts**, in all of our contributions because we are stronger together;
- **Stay with our service**, whether we feel it is acknowledged or not or whether we feel it is making a difference or not—God knows our efforts and God is making a way through these wastelands and will continue to bless our efforts.

- **Stay with our witness** and keep talking with one another, keep the lines of communication open with one another, keep loving one another, keep encouraging one another—
- For we are a beloved community who God is not through with yet——for God is up to something...God is up to something indeed—— however we must stay with it to see it!
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